

Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge  
c/o Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex  
73 Weir Hill Road  
Sudbury, MA 01776  
978/443 4661  
978/443 2898 fax  
Fw5rw\_emnwr@fws.gov  
<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/assabeteriver>

Federal Relay Service  
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing  
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
<http://www.fws.gov>

For Refuge Information  
1 800/344 WILD

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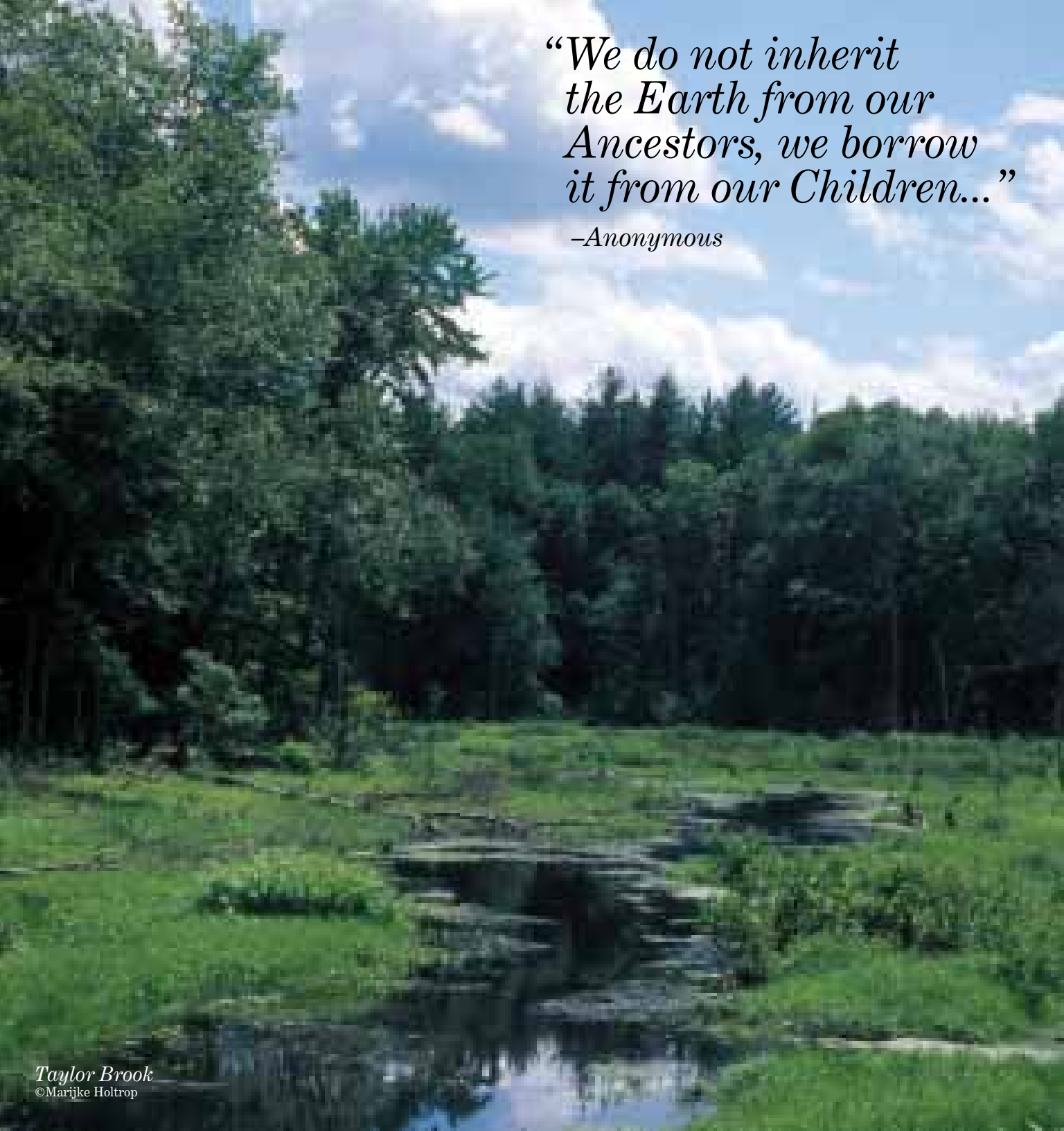
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Assabet River

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



*Eastern  
Towhee*  
©Steve Baranoff

A scenic landscape photograph of a forest stream. The stream flows from the background towards the foreground, surrounded by lush green grass and dense evergreen trees. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

*“We do not inherit  
the Earth from our  
Ancestors, we borrow  
it from our Children...”*

*—Anonymous*

## Welcome!



This blue goose, designed by J.N. “Ding” Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System

Once upon a time these lands were hunted and fished by Native Americans, farmed by colonists, crossed by wagon trains and railroads and used for military training. Today, this is the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge – a place for wildlife and a place for people.

The Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) has a large wetland complex, several smaller wetlands and vernal pools, and large forested areas which are important feeding and breeding areas for migratory birds and other wildlife. It also has 15 miles of trails open to the public for the enjoyment of nature as well as a visitor center located on Winterberry Way (opening in 2010).

The refuge is located approximately 20 miles west of Boston in portions of the towns of Hudson, Maynard, Stow and Sudbury. It consists of several separate pieces of land: a 1,900-acre northern section, a 300-acre southern section, and 113 acres scattered along the Assabet River in Stow. The main entrance to the refuge is at 680 Hudson Road in Sudbury.

The refuge is one of eight national wildlife refuges that comprise the Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex. These eight ecologically diverse refuges include Assabet River, Great Meadows, Mashpee, Massasoit, Monomoy, Nantucket, Nomans Land Island and Oxbow. Information about the complex and these refuges is available at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/easternmanwrcomplex>.

## Becoming a refuge

Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System). The System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and is the world’s premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve

America’s fish, wildlife and plants. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida’s Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to more than 150 million acres, 550 national wildlife refuges and other units of the System, plus 37 wetland management districts.

Formerly known as the Fort Devens Sudbury Training Annex, the refuge was established in 2000, when the Army transferred 2,230 acres to the Service. This transfer was made under the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, for its “particular value in carrying out the national migratory bird management program.”



Jan Wright

*Army bunker*

Initially, this area was utilized by Native Americans that had established villages. The landscape offered great fishing opportunities and subsistence living. Land use in New England started to change with the onset of King Phillip’s War in 1675 and English colonization. The area was transformed into a farming community and agriculture became quite prosperous. One famed farmer included Henry Ford founder of the “Model T”. The remaining stonewalls that bisect the refuge are visual reminders of the farming history. In 1942, the United States Army purchased the property from landowners to establish the Fort Devens Sudbury Training

Annex. During the years of military ownership, the land became a storage area for ammunition and a training location for troops.

### **The Assabet River – the inspiration for our name**

The refuge name was inspired by the Assabet River. The famed writer Nathaniel Hawthorne once said “A more lovely stream than this...has never flowed on earth.” Love and admiration of the river has existed for centuries, and portions of the refuge run along sections of the river. It provides additional recreation opportunities such as fishing and paddling.

*River otter*



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### *Managing for Native Species*

Although the refuge is located in a largely-developed area, it has been protected by the Army since 1942. That protection has allowed the maturation of extensive, structurally diverse wetland habitats whose ecological integrity is enhanced by its surrounding upland forests and grasslands. Refuge staff, volunteers, a Friends group and local partners are working hard to help wildlife in many ways.

Native wildlife depends on healthy, native plant life. Over the years, many non-native invasive plant species have made their way into the local landscape and have degraded habitat value for migratory birds, land animals and native plants alike. All non-native invasive species, including

Japanese knotweed, black locust, and spotted knapweed are a concern at the refuge. These species limit the productivity of wildlife habitat. Native food sources are critical to wildlife survival and overall health. For example, when birds feed on Oriental bittersweet berries, they are receiving no nutritional value and no fat is being stored. This can make an animal more susceptible to disease and predation. A balanced, healthy diet is just as important for wildlife as it is for humans. The refuge has been combating the spread of non-native invasive plant species through the use of herbicide, biological control and manual removal. The earlier invasive species are detected, the better chances of control and eradication. People can do their part at home by landscaping with native plants, properly disposing of any invasives from their yards, and by staying on refuge trails when visiting so you don't transport seeds from one site to another.

*Students removing Invasives*



Susan J. Russo/USFWS

Refuge biologists and volunteers participate in several national, regional and refuge-wide surveys. Surveys conducted include breeding bird, marshbird, anuran and vernal pools. The Assabet Keeping Track team is a dedicated group of volunteers who monitor mammal activity on the refuge throughout the year. Information gathered from surveys is used by refuge staff to guide habitat management on the refuge.



## *Managing for species diversity*

Multiple habitats are found within the refuge. Refuge staff are managing habitats for birds under specific regional and national goals. The refuge is in Bird Conservation Region 30 which prioritizes bird species and habitats most in need of conservation. We have several of these high priority habitat types on the refuge including freshwater wetlands, oak-pine forest, and shrubland. These habitats benefit species such as the Eastern towhee, grey catbird, scarlet tanager, Baltimore oriole, American woodcock, willow flycatcher, and the Eastern kingbird. Unfortunately, all

## *American woodcock on nest*



USFWS

## *Protecting rare species*

Several vernal pools (high priority habitat in Massachusetts) have been identified on the refuge. These temporary freshwater depressions, which hold spring rains and snowmelt waters and dry out during late summer, are critical breeding habitat for amphibian, reptile and invertebrate species due to the lack of predatory fish. The refuge's pools provide breeding habitat for the blue-spotted salamander, wood frog, and spotted turtles.

## *Blanding's turtle research*

The Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) is a medium-sized, semi-aquatic freshwater turtle that inhabits wetlands in parts of the upper Midwest and New England. The New England population is disjunct from the main portion of the range. Blanding's turtles are regarded as a species of conservation concern in every New England state in which they occur. This species is listed as threatened in Massachusetts,

of these species are experiencing a population decline. Visit <http://www.acjv.org/bird-conservation-regions.htm> for more information.



Stephanie Koch/USFWS

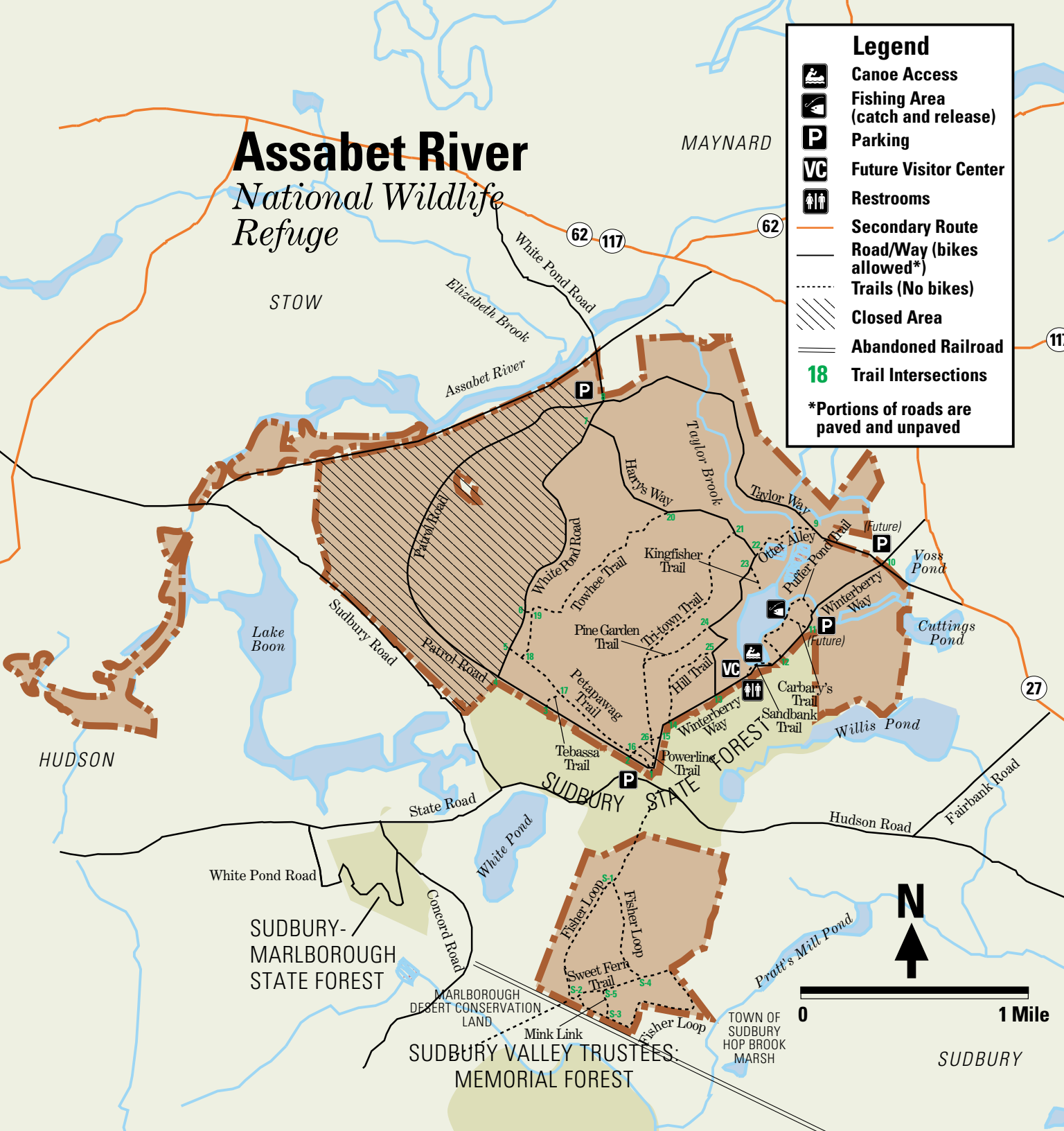
## *Blanding's turtle*

and the Service is determining if federal listing under the Endangered Species Act is warranted.

Blanding's turtles require large landscapes, compared to many other turtle species. They require a variety of wetland habitats, make frequent seasonal overland movements between them, and therefore suffer mortality not only from direct wetland habitat loss, but from upland landscape fragmentation as well. Protection of individual wetland sites has been difficult enough, but large-scale landscape conservation is even more daunting, especially in the heavily developed northeastern U.S.

Two of the largest populations of Blanding's turtles in the northeast exist at Oxbow NWR and Great Meadows NWR, and biologists are partnering with researchers to establish another population at Assabet River NWR, which is roughly equidistant between the other two populations. The project involves collecting Blanding's turtle hatchlings from Oxbow NWR, individually marking them, and then either releasing them directly in wetlands at the donor site and new site, or raising them in captivity for their first year. The year-old "head-started" turtles

# Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge



HUDSON

SUDBURY-MARLBOROUGH  
STATE FOREST

MARLBOROUGH  
DESERT CONSERVATION  
LAND

SUDBURY VALLEY TRUSTEES:  
MEMORIAL FOREST

TOWN OF  
SUDBURY  
HOP BROOK  
MARSH

SUDBURY

are larger and more likely to survive into their second year when they are released into the wild. To supplement the repatriation effort, biologists are also trapping and moving juvenile turtles from the source population at Oxbow NWR, marking and radio tagging these juveniles, and tracking their movements and habitat choices at Assabet River NWR once they are released.

## Enjoying the refuge

Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge is a unique place where visitors can explore the outdoors and view nature in a new light. When visiting the refuge, people can engage their senses and become a part of the environment. It is a place for families, individuals, school groups, Scouts and naturalists alike. With the change of seasons, a visit to the same location can be ever-changing and something new always awaits you. From walks to Puffer Pond and along wetlands to light hikes through mixed forest habitat, visitors can feel a true sense of place and partake in nature discovery.

The opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation flourish at the refuge. Wildlife photography, observation, and environmental education occur throughout the year. In addition, staff, volunteers and Friends group members offer interpretive programming on occasion. With 15 miles of trails, visitors can explore multiple habitats, participate in many recreational activities and find their special place at the refuge. Bicycling is allowed on Patrol Road, Taylor Way, White Pond Road, Winterberry Way and Harry's Way. This use has been authorized as a means of transportation to facilitate wildlife-dependent uses. The refuge has a new visitor center which will open in 2010. Once open, it will be a host site for environmental education

and general public programming, a nature store run by our Friends group, interactive exhibits, and a multi-purpose meeting space which may be utilized by conservation organizations.



Greg Thompson/USFWS

*White-tailed deer*



USFWS

## *Hunting & Fishing*

The refuge is open to hunting, in accordance with Massachusetts state laws and refuge specific regulations. Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on national wildlife refuges must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific regulations in 50 CFR Part 32). Permitted species are white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, gray squirrel, rabbit, woodcock and spring turkey. All refuge regulations apply and all hunters must possess a refuge issued permit. Fishing is authorized in accordance with state law, but is currently restricted to the Barron fishing access on Puffer Pond.





USFWS

*Wild turkey*

## Our Friends

The refuge is fortunate to have the support of *The Friends of the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge*. This dedicated group of local citizens was formed in 2000 to support the mission of the Service and the purposes of the refuge. They encourage individuals to get involved in helping to protect the refuge's natural resources, offer interpretive programming and are active in fundraising. Check them out at <http://www.farnwr.org>.

*Red-winged blackbird*



Donna Dewhurst/USFWS

## Wildlife Watching Tips

Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife.

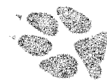
During the summer afternoons little wildlife is moving.

Observe from the sidelines. Leave “abandoned” young animals alone. A parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave. Don’t offer snacks; your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.

Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence. Many animals that have hidden will reappear once they think you are gone. Walk quietly in designated areas, being aware of sounds and smells. Often you will hear more than you will see.

Teach children quiet observation. Other wildlife watchers will appreciate your consideration.

Look for animal signs. Tracks, scat, feathers, and nests left behind often tell interesting stories.





## A Few Simple Rules

- The refuge is open to the public for many wildlife-dependent recreational uses, such as wildlife observation and photography, interpretive programming, environmental education, hunting, and fishing. Wildlife observation in the winter can be done on cross-country skis and snowshoes. Bicycles are authorized on Winterberry Way, Harry's Way, Taylor Way, Patrol Road and White Pond Road only.
- Motorized vehicles are restricted to parking areas and Winterberry Way.
- Help us protect wildlife by observing the posted speed limit of 15 mph. This applies to all vehicles and bicycles.
- Access to the refuge is permitted from sunrise to sunset.
- Hunting is authorized through a refuge permit system. Please inquire at visitor center or the refuge complex headquarters office at 73 Weir Hill Road in Sudbury for details.
- Although pets are often a travel companion, pets are not allowed on the refuge.
- Horses are not permitted on the refuge.
- Camping, fires, and swimming are prohibited.
- Rollerblading, kites, frisbees and other activities such as this are not allowed.
- Canoe and kayak access is limited to the open waters of Puffer Pond. Access to the pond is located on the Sandbank Trail only.
- Fishing is only authorized at Puffer Pond from the pier at the Barron Fishing Access Site. No live bait allowed. Ice fishing is also not allowed. Fishing is catch and release only (due to high mercury content of fish in the pond).
- The disturbance, destruction, or removal of wildlife and vegetation are prohibited.
- Visitors are required to stay on designated paths and trails. Military personnel still have access to certain areas, so please be cautious of their presence.



*Yellow warbler*



*Spotted salamander*

## Getting There

### **Hudson Road (Main Gate) Access:**

From Route 2, take Exit 42 (Route 27) south towards Acton and through Maynard. Go straight through lights at junction with Route 117 in Maynard, following Route 27 south until you see Fairbank Road on the right. Take Fairbank Road to the end. Turn right off of Fairbank Road onto Hudson Road. Follow for about one mile, and main refuge entrance is on the right. This route is approximately eight miles.

From Hudson/Stow area, follow Route 62 East to Main Street in Hudson, onto State Road in Stow, which turns into Hudson Road, Sudbury. Main refuge entrance is on left after Department of Fire Services headquarters.

*If using any navigation system, it is advised to use 680 Hudson Rd, Sudbury, MA.*

### **White Pond Road (North Gate)**

**Access:** From Route 2, take Exit 42 (Route 27) south towards Acton and through Maynard. Turn right at lights that junction with Route 117 in Maynard and follow 117 west. Follow straight through lights that junction with Route 62, and follow into Stow. Turn left onto White Pond Road. Follow to end. This route is approximately 6.5 miles.

A parking area on Old Marlboro Road in Maynard may be constructed in 2011.

## Leave No Trace

The refuge is a “Carry In, Carry Out” site. Please remember: this is YOUR national wildlife refuge! Respect the wildlife, the land and other visitors, so that the experience you enjoy can be passed on to future generations.

***Remember to take only pictures and leave only footprints.***



*Vernal pool*